

THE ROLE OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PASTORAL REGION

The purpose of this document is to clarify the role of the pastoral council in the implementation of a pastoral region. The document consists of two parts: Part I describes the normative context of pastoral council functioning within which the process for implementing a pastoral region takes place; Part II describes how the regional implementation process fits within that normative context.

Part I: Context

The process for the implementation of a pastoral region is a special instance of the normative process of pastoral council functioning. Normative pastoral council functioning is therefore the context within which the regional implementation process occurs. This section constitutes a review of the key players and basic features of pastoral council functioning which need to be in place before and during the implementation of a pastoral region.

The Pastor

The following need to be kept in mind regarding the role of the pastor in normative pastoral council functioning:

- The pastor serves at the behest of the bishop, who has entrusted the people of God in a particular Community of Faith to the pastor's care.
- The pastor is a servant-leader who tries to know his people and to serve his parishioners, in part by encouraging them, recognizing their gifts, and empowering them to use those gifts in the service of the community.
- A pastor is aware of the breadth and depth of his knowledge and experience, realizing that he is not an expert in all things and knowing that a parish is a complex community of faith with many people, opportunities and some issues which may lie beyond his knowledge and experience.
- Pastors therefore make use of consultative structures such as the pastoral council that the Church has provided in order to benefit from the wisdom of God's people.

- Through his pastoral council, a pastor consults the group that represents the parish community in the hope that through dialogue with them, he may test ideas, assumptions and proposals, and otherwise understands more clearly the parish's pastoral situation and needs in order to make better decisions regarding the needs.
- When a pastor consults his pastoral council, he shows his confidence in a means of addressing pastoral issues in which different perspectives are expressed and examined in the light of reason informed by faith.

The Parish Pastoral Council

The following need to be kept in mind regarding the role of the parish pastoral council in normative council functioning:

- All the faithful of the parish are called to share in the mission that God has entrusted to them. Yet among the parish faithful is a group which assists the pastor in the overall planning and his decision-making for the parish. It is the parish pastoral council representing the wider parish community. It has the task of advising the pastor on important matters of pastoral activity.
- The parish pastoral council is a consultative body. It gives sound advice which allows the pastor to draw upon a broader base of knowledge and a practical wisdom that lies within the parish community. Like other consultative bodies in the parish (the Finance Council, the Education Commission, etc.) it is not a legislative body in the sense of having the right to make rules which the pastor and the rest of the parish are compelled to follow. The final decisions are the pastor's. The council's recommendations have no binding authority apart from him.
- At the pastor's initiative, the council: (a) studies some question, issue, or fact related to the parish's pastoral situation, (b) carefully and prayerfully reflects upon it, and, (c) reaches well-considered conclusions regarding it. The council then recommends some policy, action or plan to the pastor and, if he accepts the recommendations, they become part of the parish's pastoral plan.
- Effective council members must be willing and able: (a) to accept their consultative role, and, (b) to carry out the functions of a pastoral council as outlined above. Therefore, a thorough discernment of member qualifications is called for. Council members should be people of faith, prayer, and good moral standing, have open and inquiring minds, be able to think creatively about Church situations and problems, be tolerant of

alternative views, comfortable with creative conflict, and interpersonally skilled.

- In preparing for the implementation of a pastoral region, council members must be sensitive to the unique challenges pastoring more than one parish brings, especially the issue of parochialism.

The Process

The following need to be kept in mind regarding the consultative process in which the pastor and his pastoral council are engaged:

- The pastor presides at the council because he is doing the consulting. Normally, he relies upon the council's internal officers to assist with the facilitation of the consultative process. A chairperson normally makes sure that: (a) there is a balance of participation among members in the council's discussions, (b) members adhere to the agenda topic at hand, (c) any conflicts that arise are managed constructively, and, (d) there is follow-through on any task-related commitments made by individual members or subgroups. A secretary usually keeps the minutes of meetings, which convey the essence of the meetings' outcomes in a manner suitable to being made available to the parish at large.
- It is the pastor's responsibility to set the agenda for the council's meetings. He normally does this in consultation with his pastoral staff and the council's officers; however, because he is doing the consulting, it is ultimately up to him to determine what matters will be considered by the council at any given time. Through the agenda, the pastor brings to the table a matter of importance to the parish's present pastoral situation or its pastoral plan for the future. It is not a matter about which he has already made up his own mind, and he is making an implied commitment not to make up his mind until he has received the council's wisdom about the matter. In addition to what is to be discussed, the agenda also states the desired outcomes of the consultation, the specific processes to be used, and any materials that will be needed in securing those outcomes.
- The relationship between a pastor and his pastoral council is a spiritual one in which the pastor believes that the council will be able to help him discern where the Holy Spirit is leading the parish. To consult well, therefore, requires careful and prayerful thought on the part of everyone involved, so adequate provision should be made for times of prayer and authentic conversation in the council's consultative process.
- After the council has done its research, carried out its considerations and made its recommendations, the pastor will normally implement those recommendations either personally or through delegation to staff

or other program implementing bodies in the parish. Afterwards, he may or may not use the council to evaluate the effectiveness of that implementation.

- Ordinarily, when a council prayerfully discusses and seeks to build consensus, it is the rare occasion when a pastor would not approve or ratify a council recommendation. However, the pastor must not follow any advice or proposal from the council that would be contrary to universal church law, diocesan law or policies, or civil law, or contrary to his own best pastoral judgment.
- A final note: The process is meant to be effective, efficient and even an experience of grace. It need not and should not be cumbersome. Ultimately, the process is a good stewardship of everyone's time, talent and treasure.

Part II: The Role of the Pastoral Council in the Implementation of a Pastoral Region

The implementation of a pastoral region is based upon a commitment of the parishes involved to work together, share ministries as needed, and coordinate sacramental schedules in order to most effectively live the mission of Jesus Christ in the region.

The process for the implementation of a pastoral region is a special instance of the normative process of pastoral council functioning as described above. This section attempts to show how that process "fits" or is situated within that context.

Pastors and Pastoral Administrators

- Pastors, Parochial Administrators and Pastoral Administrators present in the parishes of the pastoral region at the time the region's Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee begins meeting serve as the guarantors of the implementation planning process. It is their responsibility to guide the overall process of planning for the implementation and to insure that diocesan requirements are met.
- The sharing of pastors takes place as the need arises. The implementation of a pastoral region by the Archbishop may be

accelerated if there is an unexpected change in the status of a pastor or administrator serving one of the parishes involved. Eventually all of the parishes in a pastoral region must be prepared to share a single pastor.

Pastor(s), parochial administrators and pastoral administrator(s) in a region serve all the parishes of the region. They shepherd the process of regional implementation through consultation with their pastoral councils, pastoral staffs, and a Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee in order to ensure that they can best meet each parish's needs in a way that makes the most sense for the people of the region as a whole.

Pastoral Councils

- Since there is more than one parish involved in the implementation of a pastoral region, there is more than one pastoral council involved. Pastoral councils normally consult on matters of importance to the whole parish; however, in the case of regional implementation, the “whole” involved is not parochial but regional.
- Therefore, the initial role of the pastoral councils in the region is to consult with their pastor(s) in the establishment and delegation of a Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee Planning charged with making preparations for that time when the pastoral region will be fully implemented by the Archbishop.
- After the Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee has done its work, the pastoral councils in the region will again be consulted in the approval of the Committee's plans before they are submitted to the Archbishop for final approval.

The Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee

- Normally, an equal number of parishioners from each parish in the pastoral region will be appointed by the pastor(s) and/or parochial administrator(s) to serve on the Pastoral Region Planning Committee, in consultation with the pastoral councils involved.

- The pastor(s), parochial administrator(s) and pastoral administrator(s) sit on the Pastoral Region Planning Committee, and it is helpful to have at least one member of each pastoral council on the team in order to insure good and reliable communication between the councils and the Committee. It is recommended that paid staff from each parish, other than the pastor(s) or parochial administrator(s) assist the Pastoral Region Planning Committee as needed.
- The purpose of the Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee is to study, and deliberate in order to develop and recommend a plan to be a vibrant church, living the mission of Jesus Christ in the pastoral region, a plan that expresses the unique identities and concerns of the individual parishes involved with the emerging identity and concerns of the region as a whole.
- This recommended plan is presented to the Archbishop after a consultation with the parish communities in the region and the approval of its parish pastoral councils.

Notes:

1. For a more detailed description of the PRCC, check the Website for the Archdiocese under “Pastoral Regions.” Go to “For Parish Leaders” and click on “Pastoral Region Coordinating Committee.”
2. The above ideas on the Parish Pastoral Council are consistent with and reflect key ideas from three documents also found on the “For Parish Leaders” link:
 - *Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils*
 - *Consulting the Wisdom of the Parish Community*
 - *The Consultative Process in Action*